

China: Ultra-Communism

Down on the Farm

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WHILE the world's attention has been focused on the Quemoy crisis, Red China has been in the throes of a new and gigantic domestic upheaval, resulting from an attempt to organize the whole peasantry, five hundred million people, in "communes." This is the third upheaval that rural China has undergone in this decade. First, the landlords were expropriated and their land was shared out among the peasants, who were officially encouraged to continue as private farmers. Then, in the middle 1950's, more than a hundred million private farmsteads were reorganized into "co-operatives," modeled essentially on Soviet collective farms. And now the Communist Chinese rulers, moving ahead of their Soviet counterparts, are going beyond that stage of collectivization and replacing the collective farm by the commune.

Of these three upheavals, none has gone as deep as this one, for none has made such deep inroads into the traditional mode of life of the peasantry, which still constitutes four-fifths of China's population. There can be no doubt that the decree which initiated the "movement for the commune" is, if only because of the vast scale of the movement, one of the most significant events of our time.

Faster and Farther

The idea of the commune is not new. Shortly after the Bolshevik Revolution, in the years 1918-1923, it was tried out in Russia on a small scale. But that experiment ended in failure. The Russian communes had been formed by groups of idealists who hoped to set an example for the mass of peasantry. Within the commune, which in this respect differed essentially from the kolkhoz of later years, all private property was abolished. Land, cattle, and agricultural implements were owned in common. The members of the commune were

not to get individual incomes but to draw on the commune's income in an egalitarian manner or "according to their needs." The experiment failed because the Russian peasant remained attached to his private farmstead. Communist farming, organized on an extremely low level of agricultural technique, was too poor to attract him. After a few years the communes, discredited and ridiculed, were dissolved.

When Stalin later set out to collectivizing farming he forbade every mention of the commune. Ever since, the commune has remained under something like an ideological ban in the Soviet Union. In the kolkhoz the peasants still own privately small plots of land and about half the cattle; they trade their products on

the markets; and they draw unequal incomes from the kolkhoz so that in each there are "rich" and poor peasants just as there are rich and poor kolkhozes. The Russian collective farm has remained a halfway house between the private farm and the commune.

The Chinese leaders, obviously not content with this degree of collectivization, have now startlingly rehabilitated the commune. They have decided to move henceforth on the road of collectivization faster and farther than the Russians, despite the fact that in technology and productivity their farming is far behind the Russian. True, what they envisage is not to be modeled exactly on the early Soviet commune, but it is to be much closer to it than the kolkhoz is. The Chinese commune is to be a much larger unit than the Soviet kolkhoz. It is to consist of five, ten, or even twenty thousand families—about ten times more than in a kolkhoz after nearly thirty years of collectivization. The Chinese have taken up the idea of the "Agro-town," which Khrushchev once put forward, which Stalin repudiated, and which Khrushchev does not dare resurrect even now. The Chinese peasants, unlike the Russians, are not to retain private plots of land, implements, and cattle. They are not to go on living in their private huts, within small households; instead all members of the commune are to be housed in a few central blocks of dwellings, with their own communal dining rooms, laundries, schools, etc., until the structure of the village resembles that of a collectivist town.

These sweeping changes are to be carried out within three to six years; and we are told that about a third of the peasantry, more than 150 million people, has already joined the communes.

It seems, however, that the Chinese appear to be eager to show that they are not following in Soviet footsteps but are opening new paths. In the Soviet Union, farming and industry are distinct and separate, the former remaining relatively dispersed and the latter being highly concentrated and predominantly urban. For the supply of implements, factors, and transport, Soviet farming is completely dependent on the



state-owned industry. In contrast, the Chinese commune is to combine local industry with farming.

The reform has also an important military aspect. The commune is to possess its own militia, a territorial military unit tied to the productive unit, so that the "armed hand" of the commune will participate in productive work and that "productive work will increasingly be organized along military lines." This again is an idea that was originally developed in Russia, in the early years of the revolution, when Trotsky "militarized" labor and organized the bulk of the Red Army as territorial militias attached to productive units. These experiments were gradually abandoned in Russia after the civil war. The workers revolted against the militarization of labor, and in later years the militias were considered to be inadequate for modern warfare. Further, since Trotsky had been the originator of these experiments, a stigma has attached to them ever since. Mao Tse-tung, however, has not been averse to drawing his ideas from the main fount of Communist heresy. His scheme has indeed a super-Trotskyist flavor; Trotsky never attempted to militarize labor on the scale of Mao's plan, and he undertook the experiment only under the stress of Russia's economic collapse in the final phase of the civil war.

MAO'S MOTIVES for this stupendous undertaking are varied and interconnected, and they are all rooted in the manifold disproportions be-

tween China's aspirations and resources. There is, first of all, the general lack of balance between China's population and wealth. Mao and his pupils are no Malthusians; they hold that the larger the nation's manpower, the more can it produce (especially when it does not have to produce for profit only) and the quicker can the nation's wealth grow.

But Mao realizes that although this principle may be valid in the long run, the immediate pressure of China's population on its means of subsistence is severe, and that it must become even more severe with the popular expectation of a higher standard of living. By concentrating the whole rural population in large but compact productive units and by introducing a new division of labor within the units, Mao hopes he will be able to achieve a dramatic rise in the national productivity of labor.

Mao believes—his entourage tells everyone who cares to listen—that he has avoided and can continue to avoid Stalin's major error in collectivization and industrialization. In collectivization, Mao says, Stalin relied primarily on coercion. In industrialization, he relied almost exclusively on large-scale and long-term schemes, as a consequence of which all links between industry and farming were severed for a time. Soviet farming, unsupported by small-scale local industry, was bound to fall behind badly during the transition period, before the new industry was ready to provide it

with enough machines, tractors, and fertilizers.

The Plan's Advantages

These, then, are the major mistakes against which Mao is on his guard. Of course the Chinese leaders, too, have their ambitious large-scale and long-term industrial schemes that should allow them to overtake Great Britain industrially within a few years. China's coal output is already about as high as Britain's, and its output of steel is about half as large. But even after China has won this race—a race watched with bated breath by the whole of Asia—its per capita industrial output will still be only one twelfth or one-thirteenth of the British. China's large-scale industry will not yet be able to absorb more than a tiny fraction of its rural surplus; and its agriculture may still remain starved of iron, steel, and machinery. Hence Mao's emphasis on the combination of industry and agriculture within the commune.

That industry can be only of a most backward character; it will consist of primitive workshops and will be based on old-fashioned handicraft. But even this is better than no industry at all. The commune's primitive workshops can keep the commune's farm supplied with plows until enough tractors and machines are forthcoming from the modern government-built plants. Local rural industry may also soon absorb the surplus rural population and give many peasants preliminary industrial training before they are transferred to urban industry. The commune is to serve as a reservoir of semi-skilled industrial manpower on which the planning authorities can gradually draw.

The military aspect of the commune, which has been greatly played up during the Quemoy crisis, fits in with this pattern. Already some years ago Peking promulgated a law introducing conscription, but it has been a dead letter. The armed forces have not been in a position to take in the many millions of young men who every year become liable for military service. There have not been enough barracks, not enough equipment, not enough training staffs. Now the millions of potential conscripts are to receive at least paramilitary training within the commune, which thus is



Finally, it goes without saying that Peking's rulers expect to gain obvious political advantages. It should be easier to exert political control over a peasantry concentrated in Agrotowns than over a dispersed rural population.

Are the Chinese Different?

If the objectives of the Chinese movement for communes are clear enough, its prospects are hazy. How, one wonders, have the Chinese peasants received the latest orders and slogans issued from Peking? How do they react to this blow that Mao's party has struck against private property and the traditional way of life of rural China? Are the Chinese peasants really devoid of the "individualistic instincts" that have made peasants in so many other countries put up a desperate resistance to collectivization? When the Soviet peasants revolted against Stalin's forcible collectivization, they slaughtered half their cattle, smashed implements, and set fire to their crops, thus to some extent defeating collectivization even while they themselves were being crushed. Is some such determined revolt now latent in the Chinese countryside? Or are the peasants joining the communes "with enthusiasm," as Peking claims and as some recent western travelers believe?

It is difficult not only for outsiders and foreign travelers but even for the rulers in Peking to judge what is going on in the hearts of a mass of half a billion people. But it may be that Mao Tse-tung and his party are now getting dividends from the caution and flexibility with which, in contrast to Stalin and his followers, they arranged the opening phases of collectivization some years ago. Stalin at first attempted to impose wholesale collectivization at a stroke and to confiscate all the peasants' belongings; only bloody resistance forced him to retreat, to compromise, to make concessions to the peasants' "property instincts" in order to save the general framework of the collective farm. The initial collision, however, was so violent that memories of it survive in the Soviet Union to this day and even now weigh upon relations between state and peasantry. The Chinese collectivization

not led to any comparable conflict and shock. The peasantry was drawn into the co-operatives gradually and mildly. The farmer's proverbial individualism, which revolted against Stalin's raw surgery, appears to have fallen into a coma under Mao's anesthetic treatment.

The difference in results has shown up quickly. Stalin's collectivization was followed by a steep and prolonged decline in the productivity of Soviet agriculture and the death of millions in famines. Mao's collectivization, on the contrary, has led to a steady rise in farming output. This has been accounted for in part by the building of anti-flood dams and by large-scale irrigation works, which were more easily undertaken with collectively organized labor than with the old-time individualistic villagers. In any case, this year China has a record harvest, nearly twice as large as last year's and more than three times larger than the last harvest before the revolution. The achievement is all the more remarkable because it has been obtained with the most primitive technical means, mainly on the basis of co-operated manual labor.

Unlike the Soviet peasants of the 1930's, the Chinese have seen their well-being improving rapidly with collectivization, however modest that improvement may be by any western standard. These benefits seem to have weakened their attachment to private farming and perhaps even reconciled them to a collectivist economy. Having secured this favor-

able reaction, Mao may find it easier to take the peasants a stage further toward the commune. He still proceeds with great caution and keeps his avenues of retreat open. He plans to draw out the whole process of reorganization over a number of years. He delays the introduction of an egalitarian distribution of income within the commune and tries to give due weight to individual rewards and incentives. He warns the Communists against the use of coercion against the peasants, and at the same time he seeks to overwhelm the peasantry's mind with a most intensive propaganda for the commune. With an already favorable start, with the use of such varied ways and means, and with so much subtlety, his régime may succeed where no other Communist government has succeeded.

However, this is only a hypothetical view of the prospects; some time must elapse before the reaction of the Chinese peasantry can be gauged. It is still possible that the experiment will crash spectacularly and cause grave social turmoil.

Damning with No Praise

In Russia these latest Chinese developments have been greeted with reserve and tacit irony. *Pravda* published the decree of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on September 11, but more than a month later the Soviet press still refrained from giving its blessing to the move. While its pages were full of declarations of solidarity with China over the Quemoy conflict and



of glowing tributes to Mao's other domestic achievements, no mention was made of this latest and most momentous domestic development. Such silence speaks louder than any amount of comment.

Not only is Moscow skeptical about Mao's latest undertaking, it also senses heresy. Khrushchev may resent the fact that Mao is fulfilling the Agrotown scheme, which he himself had to abandon. More important, the whole trend of Chinese domestic policy is in implicit conflict with Soviet policy. Khrushchev has just made a series of important concessions to the peasants, relaxing the Stalinist rigors of collectivization: he has sold the state-owned machine tractor stations to the collective farms, he has freed the peasants from compulsory food deliveries, and he has attempted to place the economic relationship between state and peasantry on something like a market basis. To Soviet ears there is something almost blasphemous in the Chinese talk about the commune's superiority to any ordinary collective farm, if only because for years to come the Chinese commune will be based on a technical level of farming far lower than that prevailing in the Soviet kolkhoz. Similarly, the Chinese territorial militias with their "soldier-citizens" and "soldier-laborers" have too much of the early Bolshevik aura about them to please the present Soviet rulers.

Evidently the Chinese leaders are taking their talk about their own "road to socialism" much more seriously than the Russians like. Sooner or later these implicit divergencies between the Soviet and Chinese attitudes may give rise to new controversy in the Communist camp. The whole course of collectivization in China is unmistakably, if only implicitly, a critique of the Soviet road to socialism.

Moscow appears to be as apprehensive about Mao's present "ultraradical" deviation from Stalinist or post-Stalinist orthodoxy as it was two years about his "ultra-liberal" Hundred Flowers policy. In Moscow's view, Mao went too far in promising freedom of expression and was compelled to reimpose monolithic discipline. Is he not now in-

dolging in dangerous illusions about the peasantry's willingness to accept the commune? In both cases Mao's ambitions may have exceeded China's resources and possibilities. When he tried to carry de-Stalinization further than the Russians had carried it, he ignored the circumstance that the basic factor behind Soviet de-Stalinization was Soviet industrial and educational progress, which had become incompatible with many of the totalitarian practices of the Stalin era.

Mao has since discovered that his essays in "liberalization" accord ill with the mass discipline that is required in the initial phase of forced industrialization. On the other hand, Moscow is inclined to take the view that China is industrially and socially too backward for the "advanced forms of socialism" which Mao now attempts to foster. The Soviet Union,

with its powerful state-owned industry and its vastly expanded urban working class, still shrinks from imposing the Agrotown and the commune on its peasantry, which is relatively much weaker vis-a-vis the state and the urban working class than is the Chinese peasantry. Is it not then, reckless of Mao to defy the individualism of his peasantry?

These are the questions pondered by the guardians of orthodoxy and the policymakers in Moscow. But much more than orthodoxy and dogma is involved. If the movement for the commune succeeds in China, the Soviet rulers may well be tempted or driven to follow in Mao's foot steps. Khrushchev may then take up once again his Agrotown scheme, and the upheaval now shaking rural China may well spread to the Soviet Union.

Pandit Nehru's One-Party Democracy

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THE CRY of "Crisis in the Congress Party" went up immediately when, early last May, Nehru expressed his intention of withdrawing "for some time" from office. The clamor did not die down even when, shortly afterward, he settled for a month's vacation and agreed to stay on. A number of things lent substance to the widespread contention that the Congress Party was disintegrating. First, there was the dramatic success of the Communist Party of India in the state of Kerala last year, when the Communists managed to form a coalition government there. Next came a governmental crisis in the state of Orissa, when the Congress held ministry resigned on orders from the central party high command. Shortly afterward, a confused intraparty scandal broke out in the Punjab, where some of the chief minister's relatives had abused their family connections for political purposes. Finally, Congress Party candidates were successively defeated in

by-elections in Devicolum (Kerala) by a Communist and in Geigoo (Punjab) by an independent.

There were other somber developments. The government's much heralded and strongly backed Community Development Program seemed to be bogging down. The chronic anemia of India's foreign exchange reserves had become acute, despite Prime Minister Nehru's diversionary mollifications.

But for all this, and serious as much of it was and still is, the Congress Party crisis soon became only the crisis that might have been if Nehru had resigned. The fact that he did not resign decided the issue—at least for the present and probably for a long time to come.

It would be difficult to exaggerate Nehru's prestige in his home country. He is the darling of the people and (as he once pictured himself in a chapter of his autobiography which has been expurgated